

money-lending and prices. The centre of the controversy—the mystery of iniquity in which a host of minor scandals were conveniently, if inaccurately, epitomized—was the problem which contemporaries described by the word usury,

¹¹ Treasure doth then advance greatness/¹ wrote

Bacon, in words characteristic of the social ideal of the age," when the wealth of the subject be rather in many hands than few." *⁴ In spite of the growing concentration of property, Tudor England was still, to use a convenient modern phrase, a Distributive State.

It was a community in which the ownership of land, and of the simple tools used in most industries, was not the badge of a class, but the attribute of a society, and in which the typical worker was a peasant farmer, a tradesman or a small master. In this world of small property-

owners, of whose independence and prosperity English

publicists boasted, in contrast with the "housed

beggars" of France and Germany, the wage-earners were a

minority scattered in the interstices of village and

borough, and, being normally themselves the sons of

peasants, with the prospect of stepping into a holding

of their own, or, at worst, the chance of squatting on

the waste, were often in a strong position *vis-à-vis* their

employers. The special economic "malaise" of an age is

naturally the obverse of its special

qualities. Except
in certain branches of the textile industry,
the grievance
which supplied fuel to social agitation, which
evoked
programmes of social reform, and which
prompted both
legislation and administrative activity,
sprang, not
from the exploitation of a wage-earning
proletariate
by its employers, but from the relation of the
producer
to the landlord of whom he held, the dealer
with whom
he bought and sold, and the local capitalist,
often the
dealer in another guise, to whom he ran
into debt.
The farmer must borrow money when the
season is
bad, or merely to finance the interval
between sowing
and harvest. The craftsman must buy raw
materials